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Of Girls of Gold and Men of Iron: A Review on the Golden Dawn Girls Documentary and the Current Predicament

Maria Paschalina Dimopoulou

I had the opportunity to watch the documentary *Golden Dawn Girls* while attending the *Jeden Svět (One World) Documentary Festival* of 2018 in Prague and I was left with mixed feelings about it. The documentary follows the main characters, three relatively known female members of the *Golden Dawn Popular Association* (most commonly known as *Golden Dawn*), a far right movement in Greece that began as a marginal and politically unimportant neo-Nazi group in 1980 to obtain the third position in the 2015 Parliamentary Elections. The film by Håvard Bustnes was completed in 2017 and premiered in November of the same year in the *IDFA Competition for Feature-Length Documentary*. Since then it has been featured in numerous international film festivals.¹

Undoubtedly it was an ambitious endeavor of the director to capture the everyday life of the women of the far right party of Greece, especially during the period that was the most turbulent for them – when the leader and most of its male parliament members were in prison, with the accusation of carrying out organized criminal activity. The crew followed Ourania Michaloliakou, the daughter of the leader – despite the fact that she disapproves of her being mostly known as such – and acting leader during his imprisonment, Evgenia (Jenny) Germeni, wife of Georgios Germenis (*Golden Dawn* member, most commonly known in the media with the nickname Keadas), and Dafni Iliopoulou, mother of *Golden Dawn* parliament member Panagiotis Iliopoulos. These women that represent every basic role and generation in a traditional family undertake the hardest task to maintain the Party's dynamic (it was fifth in Parliament at the time of the imprisonment). Not only they succeeded, but they even managed to bring the party to the third place, where it remains as of 2018. One would expect that such a success would secure their leading role in the party, however once the men were released, the leading women returned to their previous roles inside the family, allowing the men to regain their position in the Party. The documentary ends with the Baptism of Iliopoulos's daughter, who was given the name Chrisavgi ('Golden Dawn'). With this scene, the director implies the rise of *Golden Dawn* will be perpetuated, and so will the dominance of its men on the women's lives.

1 For more information on the documentary and its creators, see <https://goldendawn-girlsdoc.com>.

The director and producer of this film, Håvard Bustnes, and co-producer Christian Falch are Norwegian filmmakers that decided to follow the lives of the leading women of *Golden Dawn*. Throughout the documentary they seemed to have had previous encounters with the members they were interviewing and the fact that they are not Greek is the reason they were given access to many places and meetings. The idea that the footage might be broadcasted on *Greek National Television* deterred many to appear, let alone talk, however once reassured by the director and Jenny that the documentary will be shown abroad and with the purpose of restoring the Party's name, they seemed more cooperative. And it is what they believed as the true purpose of the documentary until its premiere, when they realized the director decided to include their backstage talks about what they would say in front of the camera and which events they would conceal. Bustnes also showed the image of people heavily invested in conspiracy theories, emerged in a distorted reality, which might explain their irrational thinking.² The director kept his promise to show the members as real, normal people with families and interests beyond their ideology, however this is how he succeeds in making them even more terrifying, implying that any person willing to believe in the Party's conspiracy theory – that Greece is at war with Europe and it must be defended by *Golden Dawn* – can become a member of it.

Before *Golden Dawn's* first major electoral win in 2012, most party members were virtually unknown, while the party itself was not presented in most mainstream media during the election campaigning periods. The media showed some attacks by *Golden Dawn* members on immigrants, but not as often as they happened. The public attention from both local and international media came with their first successful election in Parliament, which was presented as an unexpected event and unfitting for a beautiful and sunny holiday destination,³ as Greece was perceived by most foreigners. The sudden rise of the far right in Greece might be unsettling but cannot be described as completely unforeseen. It is one of the consequences brought by the collapse of the two party system and the dissolution of the nationalistic right party *Laiikos Orthodoxos Synagermos* (most commonly known as LAOS). This in connection with the economic crisis that struck in 2009 and the immigration crisis – which admittedly affected Greece much more than West European countries – could explain the Party's

2 The director was interviewed by Vena Georgakopoulou in April 2018 for a Greek news blog, before the screening of the documentary in Athens. See <http://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/enas-norvigos-kai-ta-tromahtika-koritsia-tis-hrysis-aygis>.

3 The director describes it on the documentary's trailer, see <https://goldendawngirlsdoc.com/trailer>.

entrance in Parliament. What remains inexplicable is the continuing rise of the party up to the third position in Parliament, especially when their accession peaked while the male parliament members were in prison. During the time of the men's imprisonment the women were left to deal with the image of the party being crushed daily by the media, which featured lengthy articles on the *Golden Dawn* members as a result of the ongoing trial. So the 'Golden Dawn Girls' decided not to pursue a more active representation of the party in public media, as it would have been in vain. Their only goal was to reassure through numerous meetings the existing members that the men would soon be released and re-elected in their seats. They were trusted with the leadership of the party for a short period, but once the men were free to take it back, they did; and the women happily complied with it and went on with their backstage acting, like they had been carrying out for many years. That is why it would be unfitting to compare these women with strong far right political figures, like Marine Le Pen and Frauke Petry for example. And maybe that is relevant with a notion popular among the party members, that women are inferior to men, hence they should not be given many responsibilities. One of the most well-known incidents concerning *Golden Dawn* is when Ilias Kasidiaris, high-ranking member of the Movement and parliament member, verbally attacked, threw a glass of water in Rena Dourou's face, then left wing parliament member of the *Syriza* alliance, and physically attacked Liana Kanelli, renowned journalist and *Communist Party* member, on a live morning talk show with high ratings.⁴

My first thought after watching *Golden Dawn Girls*, although the ending was not very optimistic, was that I was watching something that belonged in the past and that would not gain such intensity any time soon. I did like to believe that the Greek society was ready to step out of the shadows and abandon the ghosts of the past, in order to stand on its own feet again, which left no room for irrationality, setbacks and conspiracy theories. However, in times of crisis and uncertainty, hate-speech, irrationalism and the simplistic logic stating that the 'Others' are to blame can be reassuring and sedative. *Golden Dawn* had risen again in public discourse during the heated debates on the Greek-Macedonian name dispute. Its nationalistic views found many new supporters due to the fear cultivated by few public opinion influencers during this short period. Although at first negatively surprised, I soon realized that this was not an unexpected turn of events. What is yet unclear is whether *Golden Dawn* is taking

4 For details on the incident, see <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/greece/9316355/Greece-far-right-Golden-Dawn-politican-slaps-female-MP-on-live-TV.html>.

advantage of such matters of national importance to resurface again or if this reappearance is linked with the resurface of the far right in Europe in general. The momentary new dynamic of *Golden Dawn*, as presented in the media, seems to have positively affected its popularity, since the party is estimated to receive approximately 6–7 % of votes in the next elections, qualifying it to remain in third position.⁵ It should be noted that although *Golden Dawn* has regained relevance in daily media, the women have yet to be seen again.

6. evropský kongres novořeckých studií, Lund, 4.–7. 10. 2018

Markéta Kulhánková

Kongres novořeckých studií, největší vědecké setkání evropských neogrecistů, se od roku 1998 koná každé čtyři roky. Ten poslední hostilo v říjnu 2018 jihošvédské univerzitní město Lund. O organizaci se postarali představitelé *Skandinávské společnosti novořeckých studií* a zároveň grecistické sekce *Centra jazyků a literatur*, spadajícího administrativně pod spojené fakulty humanitních studií a teologie univerzity v Lundu. V čele organizačního výboru stanul vedoucí sekce klasických a románských studií a dlouholetá vůdčí osobnost neogrecistiky nejen ve Švédsku, ale v celé Skandinávii Vassilios Sabatakakis.

Téma bylo jako již tradičně zvoleno široké, *Řecký svět v období krize a obnovy, 1204–2018* (*Ο ελληνικός κόσμος σε περιόδους κρίσης και ανάκαμψης, 1204–2018*), a příspěvky byly rozděleny do sedmi tematických oblastí: Vliv krizí na řecký jazyk; Krize řecké literatury a řecká literatura v krizi; Krize a obnova v řecké historii a historiografii; Krize v masmédiích a na sociálních sítích; Krize a obnova v řeckém divadle a kinematografii; Vliv krizí na umění; Cestovatelé v časech krizí.

Švédské setkání mělo o poznání menší rozměry než předešlé kongresy. Zatímco programy toho v Soluni (2014) a v Granadě (2010) obsahovaly okolo

5 As presented in a public survey, conducted by *Εγνατία Point of View* after the Prespa Agreement, see more at <http://www.voria.gr/article/dimoskopisi---v-ellada-pnigete-stis-prespes-o-siriza-anodos-gia-nd>.